



**Special Issues:**

**Manual for Sponsoring Organizations and  
Guest Editors**

## Helpful Hints, General Guidelines and Information

*HSR* publishes thematic special issues or sections that reflect the journal's values of scientific integrity, methodological rigor, policy and practice relevance, and timeliness. Special issues are often the results of papers written for a conference, or may be in response to a thematic call for papers.

Publishing papers as a collection in a special issue or section allows organizations to disseminate information to the field, without the costs associated with the production and promotion of a separate publication and to enjoy the benefits of *HSR*'s peer review process, prestige and readership. More information (<http://www.hret.org/hret/publications/supplements.html>)

### Helpful Hints:

- **Page Length Recommendations for manuscripts and commentaries:** Maximum word count for full length manuscripts (inclusive of all text, references, and endnotes) is 4500 with a maximum total of 4 tables and figures (combined). The structured abstract is a maximum of 250 words. For research and methods briefs, the maximum is 2500 words and 3 tables and figures. Commentaries or editorials are generally 1500 words and seldom have tables. If electronic-only appendices are planned, they do not contribute to the word and table maximum counts.
- **Total length for the issue:** The expected total maximum for the special issue is described in terms of 'page budget', i.e., all printed pages in the special issue including the Table of Contents (TOC), Editorials and Commentaries, and accepted manuscripts. The page budget is between 120 and 160 printed pages unless special arrangements (and additional payment) are made.
- **To estimate printed pages based on Word documents,** a typical article of about 4500 words and 4 tables or figures averages 18 printed pages in *HSR*. It may be useful to examine a special issue to see the full complement of pages included in the 'page budget'. FYI, the printed Special Issue on State-Level Health Service Delivery, Access, and Practice in Dec. 2007 used: 1 page for the TOC, 5 pages for 1 editorial [1723 words] and 126 pages to print 7 articles [average 4540 words] at about 4 tables or figures each = 132 'page budget' pages in total.
- **Rate of rejection:**
  - **TYPE A:** A special issue based on an open call for papers. An open call typically has a higher rejection rate than type B special issues. For open calls, there are two types of rejections;
    - (1) Initial rejections without external review are made by the Editors in consultation with the Guest Editors, on the basis of

the initial quality review and fit to the special issue. This rejection rate is generally 35 to 50%.

- (2) Manuscripts surviving this initial cut are then sent for external peer review. The editors in consultation with the guest editors and taking into account the external reviews generally reject about 25% of these manuscripts. Most of these rejections are made after one round of external review.
- **TYPE B:** A special issue based on invited papers. These papers are presumed to merit external review and so step 1 above is bypassed. The usual rejection rate is low (less than 10%) because the guest editors are expected to work carefully with each author to bring the quality of the article to the point where it may be accepted.
- **Time from agreed upon contract to published special issue**
  - **TYPE A:** a special issue based on a call for papers. Both because the call for papers adds additional time before papers are submitted and because the revisions if requested generally involve less direct editorial intervention from guest editors, the time to print publication is generally longer, i.e., 16 months, although the time to electronic print is about one year.
  - **TYPE B:** a special issue based on invited papers is typically published in print about ten months from the acceptance date and published “Online Early” three months after receiving the final files from the author once accepted.

## OnlineEarly:

**HSR is able to post complete, peer reviewed, web-based functional manuscripts from your special issue online up to several months in advance** of the printed issue. Intended to benefit authors and readers, OnlineEarly provides subscribers access to the latest in cutting-edge research and shortens the acceptance-to-publication time, a "reward" to authors for quick turnaround time by extending the period in which an article is most often cited. To view current available OnlineEarly articles, please visit at <http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/links/toc/hsr>. AcademyHealth subscribers can also log-in through the AcademyHealth website.

## A Check-List for Sponsoring Organizations

Once the Co-Editors have approved your special issue for publication, it is necessary that the following steps occur:

- Appoint a Guest Editor to serve as the main point-of-contact for the special issue; ideally someone within the sponsoring organization familiar with the authors and manuscripts and a content expert to offer detailed editorial support to authors if appropriate.
- HSR's Business Office will schedule a call with all parties (i.e., the appointed Guest Editor, Funding Organization, Co-Editors, Assigned Senior Associate Editor) to address comments and concerns and review the special issue process.
- Submit signed "Intent to Publish" agreement to: Jennifer Shaw, HSR Business Manager, Health Research and Educational Trust, One North Franklin, Chicago, IL 60606 ([jshaw@aha.org](mailto:jshaw@aha.org)).
- Prior to publication, the sponsoring organization should confirm if they would like to purchase additional copies of the special issue (Note: 25 copies are provided for free to the sponsoring organization). The cost to do this will be stated in the "Intent to Publish" agreement.
- Payment is due upon publication of your special issue (HSR's Business Office will submit invoice to the sponsoring organization).



## **The Roles of the Guest Editor and Assigned Senior Associate Editor**

*HSR's* Guest Editors often play a critical role in the development of a Special Issue. They help in identifying funding as well as the contributors and articles to be submitted and adhering to the projected timeframe for submission to the peer review process through to publication. In addition, the Guest Editor [usually with the assigned SAE] prepares an editorial which contains an introduction and overview of the Special Issue.

This document details the Guest Editor's role in the editorial process, i.e., during peer review, once a proposal for a Special Issue has been accepted.

Since Guest Editors play a key role in the success of a Special Issue, it is recommended that prior to accepting this responsibility they familiarize themselves with *HSR* (i.e., to determine the types of papers typically published, the methods often used and the style of the journal, including structured abstracts for most submissions). More information can be found in the Editorials below.

All can be retrieved at <http://www.hret.org/hret/publications/ftprog.html>

[From Manuscript Submission to Accepted Article \(August 2003\)](#)

[Special Issues, Special Sections – Special Consideration? \(December 2003\)](#)

[Perspectives on Turnaround Time \(February 2004\)](#)

[External Peer Review at HSR \(October 2004\)](#)

Special Issues have special characteristics that differentiate them from the process used for regular manuscripts, in particular, keeping authors and reviewers both responsive to the timeframe and attuned to the intent of the special issue. More specifically, the Special Issue is often scheduled for a particular publication date (see the production schedule below), so keeping the reviewers and authors on schedule is especially important. The manuscripts for a Special Issue often make sense only when considered as a collection to be published together. This creates problems for reviewers who typically see only one manuscript and may not understand the overall framework for the Special Issue. Therefore, providing some context for them prior to review is critical.

Guest Editors have primary responsibility for soliciting manuscripts for the Special Issue and for getting authors not only to submit appropriate manuscripts to *HSR's* Manuscript Central Peer Review System but also to submit (sometimes multiple) revisions in a timely fashion. Timeliness is critical because of the contractual expectations that *HSR* has with Blackwell regarding the number of regular and special issues per volume

During the peer review process itself, Guest Editors work closely with the Senior Associate Editor (SAE) who has agreed to Co-edit the Special Issue and with the

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Managing Editor. Guest Editors are primarily responsible for making sure that the collection of manuscripts makes a valuable contribution. The HSR Editors [the assigned SAE and both Co-Editors-in-Chief (EICs)] have primary responsibility for ensuring that the manuscripts meet the usual HSR quality standards. In fulfilling these roles, the SAE is responsible for making the ‘official’ editorial recommendations to the EIC for each manuscript. The EIC in turn has the final say in whether or not manuscripts are accepted for a Special Issue. The Managing Editor will help monitor the timeliness of the process using Manuscript Central’s Administrative Center capabilities and communicate with the Guest Editor and HSR editors; however, the Guest Editor has primary responsibility for contacting the authors and reviewers as necessary to keep the process moving in a timely fashion.

In order to fulfill these roles and provide unbiased reviews and decisions, both the Guest Editor and assigned SAE should from the outset examine the set of proposed manuscripts and authors [unless there is an open call] and determine whether there are any conflicts of interests. Potential [or apparent] conflicts include being an author of a proposed paper, having a funding relationship with the research being discussed, or being a close colleague of one of the authors such as being at the same campus or having coauthored recent manuscripts with one of the authors. In most cases, conflicts of interest will not preclude being able to be a guest Editor or assigned SAE unless conflicts occur with a large number of manuscripts. However, the Guest Editor and SAE should develop an explicit procedure to follow for manuscripts where there is an apparent conflict of interest and communicate this to the EICs and Managing Editor. Both the review of manuscripts and authors for potential conflicts of interest and an explicit process to deal with any conflicts should be completed before the manuscripts are submitted.

The specifics of how the SAE and Guest Editor coordinate to invite external reviewers, evaluate reviews and reviewers’ suggestions on the manuscript, and guide the authors toward addressing particular reviewer comments or additional changes will vary slightly due to the particular characteristics of the Special Issue. Therefore, the Guest Editor is expected to work with the SAE initially to determine the specific processes to be used and to create wording to use to customize our invitation to reviewers (example template below) in the official correspondence sent via Manuscript Central. The Guest Editor will also work closely with the Managing Editor ([hsr@ucsf.edu](mailto:hsr@ucsf.edu)) to monitor the timeliness of reviewer and author responses and to create wording to inform authors about timeframes allowed for revisions. Communication among editors should occur throughout the peer review process. The Guest Editor has responsibility for initiating these conversations and for responding in a timely fashion to requests from the Editors and Managing Editor.

## **Primary Roles and Functions of Guest Editor**

In short, the Guest Editors serve as the main point-of-contact for all submitting authors, shepherding the review process and assuring that all timelines and production schedules

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are met. The specific primary roles and functions of a *HSR* Guest Editor are the following:

- 1) Prepare a list of at least five reviewers for each manuscript submission; where possible, this should be done in advance of the actual submission and as noted below.
  - *HSR* expects to have at least two external reviews (plus the SAE assessment) for each manuscript.
  - Particularly if the timelines are tight, the Guest Editor should review the list of potential reviewers in advance with the SAE and then contact these individuals about their potential availability to review manuscripts when they are submitted.
  - For some Special Issues, the pool of potential reviewers with the appropriate expertise may be quite small and some people could be valuable in reviewing several papers, so a careful allocation of effort is imperative, including a reasonable expectation of how many manuscripts each reviewer will review.
  - In cases where a manuscript requires reviewers with *different* expertise to respond to various issues raised, we prefer to have *two lists of reviewers, differentiated by expertise*; each list should also be *prioritized as to the order in which they should be invited*.
  - Reviewers may fail to respond to our Manuscript Central prompts for a reply even to agree or decline to review. After a specified period of time, the Guest Editor should make a personal appeal to the reviewer by email. This increases the likelihood of getting preferred reviewers.
  
- 2) Training on *HSR*'s ManuscriptCentral.
  - Guest Editors should schedule a time with *HSR*'s Managing Editor ([hsr@ucsf.edu](mailto:hsr@ucsf.edu)) for a 15-minute training and overview.
  
- 3) Correspond and set/maintain deadlines with Special Issue authors throughout the entire review process (i.e. from initial submission to the final acceptance/rejection decision).
  - Please note: after the manuscript submission process begins, the Guest Editor is expected to work with the SAE for each manuscript and use ManuscriptCentral for any editorial and review comments. This allows us to keep track of all the correspondence relating to a particular manuscript. "Off line" instructions via telephone and direct e-mail often lead to miscommunication and errors. If an author communicates directly via e-mail, please make sure a copy is forwarded to the Managing Editor who will include it in our files

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- If reminders about timeliness and deadlines, or other communication occurs outside of this system, please copy the Managing Editor.

## 4) Compose customization for ManuscriptCentral letters.

- *HSR's* Editorial Office offers a “Custom Invitation Reviewer” template letter that can be sent to potential reviewers on behalf of the Guest Editor and Editors. (See template to edit below.)
- The Guest Editor is expected to compose appropriate (and brief) wording to add to the custom letter to provide a context for authors or external reviewers to understand what the Special Issue’s theme and goals are.
- The Guest Editor will work with *HSR's* SAE and Editorial Office to create any other Special Issue customized letters, e.g. Decision Letters to authors; re-review requests to reviewers, etc. When the Guest Editor recommends a manuscript undergo a revision, it is imperative they include language in their comments to the authors regarding the Special Issue “tight” timeline. The Guest Editor should generally state a specific time period for authors to make their resubmission (e.g., 3 weeks).

## 5) Work with and assist the SAE.

- After receiving external reviews, the Guest Editor should help draft editor’s comments to send to the authors and make an initial recommendation to the SAE by email, who will in turn make a recommendation to the EIC on the system, Manuscript Central. Note: the EIC has final say on the decision at each step.
- For resubmitted manuscripts and author’s responses to reviews, the Guest Editor should recommend to the SAE whether re-review is needed and by whom. When the decision on the revision is ready to be made, the Guest Editor should start the process as described directly above.

## 6) If there is disagreement or any question at any given step, the editors involved will generally correspond with each other to reach a consensus. Timely responses are expected from all.



## Template Letter:

### Custom Invitation Reviewer Template Letter

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

Health Services Research has received a manuscript entitled \_\_\_\_\_ (include ID number), submitted for consideration in our special issue on \_\_\_\_\_, guest edited by \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, Senior Associate Editor. We (in consultation with the Co-Editor-in-Chief) thought you would find this topic of interest, and we would greatly appreciate it if you would review this paper for the Journal.

We need to receive the review back within 30 days maximum or sooner if possible, in order to meet the relatively tight deadlines associated with a special issue.

*Note: The Guest Editor for the specific special issue should describe the overall content for the special issue and edit the following paragraph as appropriate.*

Special issues of Health Services Research constitute collections of manuscripts on a common theme of sufficient interest to warrant publication of the manuscripts together as a package. Because they appear as a special issue, their acceptance does not influence the number of regular manuscripts the Journal publishes annually, and so space considerations per se do not need to be factored into your evaluation. We ask reviewers to consider these two questions for special issue manuscripts:

1. Would this paper meet the standards for publication in the Journal as a regular issue manuscript?
2. Will this paper make a significant contribution to a special issue .....

We try to "match" the areas of content of the paper with the reviewers' expertise but are sometimes mistaken. We've included the abstract below so you can also judge whether you would be willing to review it.

If you are not able to review this paper for whatever reason, we would greatly appreciate your suggestions of other reviewers with expertise related to this paper. Please include their e-mail addresses (preferably) or their institution.

This is the abstract of the manuscript (include abstract):

If you can review it, please respond to this email and we'll provide the necessary link with information for you to access the full manuscript on our website. In any case, please



let us know whether you can/cannot review this manuscript. [This will stop our automatic reminders too!]

We value your willingness to consider reviewing this paper and recognize and appreciate the contributions that reviewers like you make toward assuring the quality of the research in our field and at HSR in particular.

Sincerely,

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Guest Editors for the Special Issue on \_\_\_\_\_

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**Health Services Research Journal**

Official Journal of AcademyHealth

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## Health Services Research: Special Issue Timelines

Assumes at least 14 months from initial submission to print date of issue; \* online early publication can occur 2-3 months before.

| Timeline to publish in print:  | February       | April          | June          | August         | October         | December       |
|--|----------------|----------------|---------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| <b>'Drop-dead Deadlines'<br/>for completion in each step below:</b>  |                |                |               |                |                 |                |
| ALL manuscripts submitted at least 13 months before anticipated print date. (OK to have some or all submitted earlier.)                | <b>Dec 28</b>  | <b>Feb 24</b>  | <b>Apr 17</b> | <b>Jun 23</b>  | <b>Aug 21</b>   | <b>Oct 23</b>  |
| Out for review (secure 2 reviewers, each typically needs 30 day review period even if primed.)   | Jan.16-Mar.1   | Feb.27-Apr.28  | Apr.24-Jun.19 | Jun.23-Aug.31  | Sept.11-Oct.31  | Nov.6-Dec.31   |
| All decisions on first round to authors; almost none is accepted at this round, some may be rejected, however.                         | Mar 17         | May 15         | Jul 3         | Sept 15        | Nov 17          | Jan 20         |
| Authors revise manuscripts (if "revision" is decided.)   | Mar.17-Jun 9   | May.15-Jul.28  | Jul 3-Sept.11 | Sept.15-Oct.31 | Nov.17-Feb.28   | Jan 20-Apr.2   |
| All first revisions due  | Jun 9          | Jul.31         | Sept.11       | Oct 31         | Mar 1           | Apr 2          |
| Revisions out for re-review (if so decided.)   | Jun.12-Jul.21  | Aug.1-Sept.18  | Sept.18-Nov.1 | Oct.31-Jan.14  | Mar 6           | Apr.9-May.31   |
| All decisions on second round to authors.  | Aug.1          | Sept 29        | Nov 15        | Jan.31         | Apr 14          | Jun 16         |
| Authors revise manuscripts (if "revision" is decided.)   | Aug.1-Sept.11  | Sept.29-Oct.31 | Nov 15-Dec18  | Jan.31-Mar.10  | Apr.14-May.8    | Jul.16-Jul.21  |
| All final revisions due for those that will make the special issue; late returns may be dropped.                                       | Sept 11        | Nov.1          | Dec.18        | Mar 10         | May 8           | Jul 21         |
| <b>FINAL</b> decisions to authors (most acceptances will occur earlier; HRET will confirm publication of issue and so inform authors.) | <b>Sept 27</b> | <b>Nov 24</b>  | <b>Jan 13</b> | <b>Apr 1</b>   | <b>May 26th</b> | <b>Aug 2nd</b> |
| GE/SAE editorial/introduction piece due.   | Oct 30th       | Dec. 19th      | Feb 20th      | May 1st        | June 26th       | Aug 28th       |

Note: Manuscripts can (and hopefully will) move more quickly through the process, but if deadlines aren't met for the slowest moving manuscript, the timely publication of the Special Issue may be in jeopardy. Dates shown reflect publication in 2007 and dates would be adjusted slightly for other years.